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(54) **SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING MERCHANDISE**

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H04N 5/235	(2006.01)
G06Q 30/06	(2012.01)
G06T 7/00	(2006.01)

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CPC ***H04N 5/23222*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 30/0601*** (2013.01); ***G06T 7/0004*** (2013.01); ***G06T 7/0085*** (2013.01); ***H04N 5/235*** (2013.01); *G06T 2207/10004* (2013.01); *G06T 2207/30124* (2013.01)

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CPC G06T 2207/30124; G06T 7/0085; G06T 7/0004; G06T 2207/10004; H04N 5/23222; H04N 5/235; G06Q 30/0601
See application file for complete search history.

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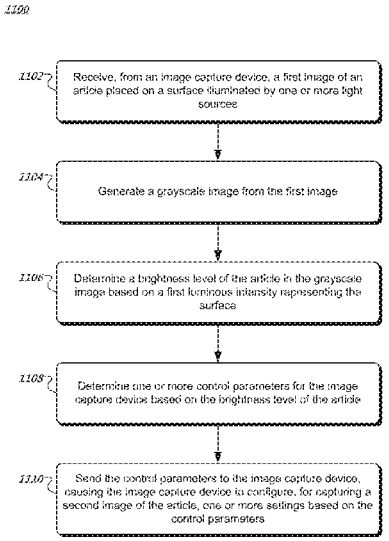
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Methods, systems, and apparatus, including computer programs encoded on a computer storage medium, for receiving, from an image capture device, a first image of an article and a background surface, the background surface being illuminated by one or more light sources, generating a grayscale image from the first image, determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface, determining one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article, and sending the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters.

15 Claims, 12 Drawing Sheets



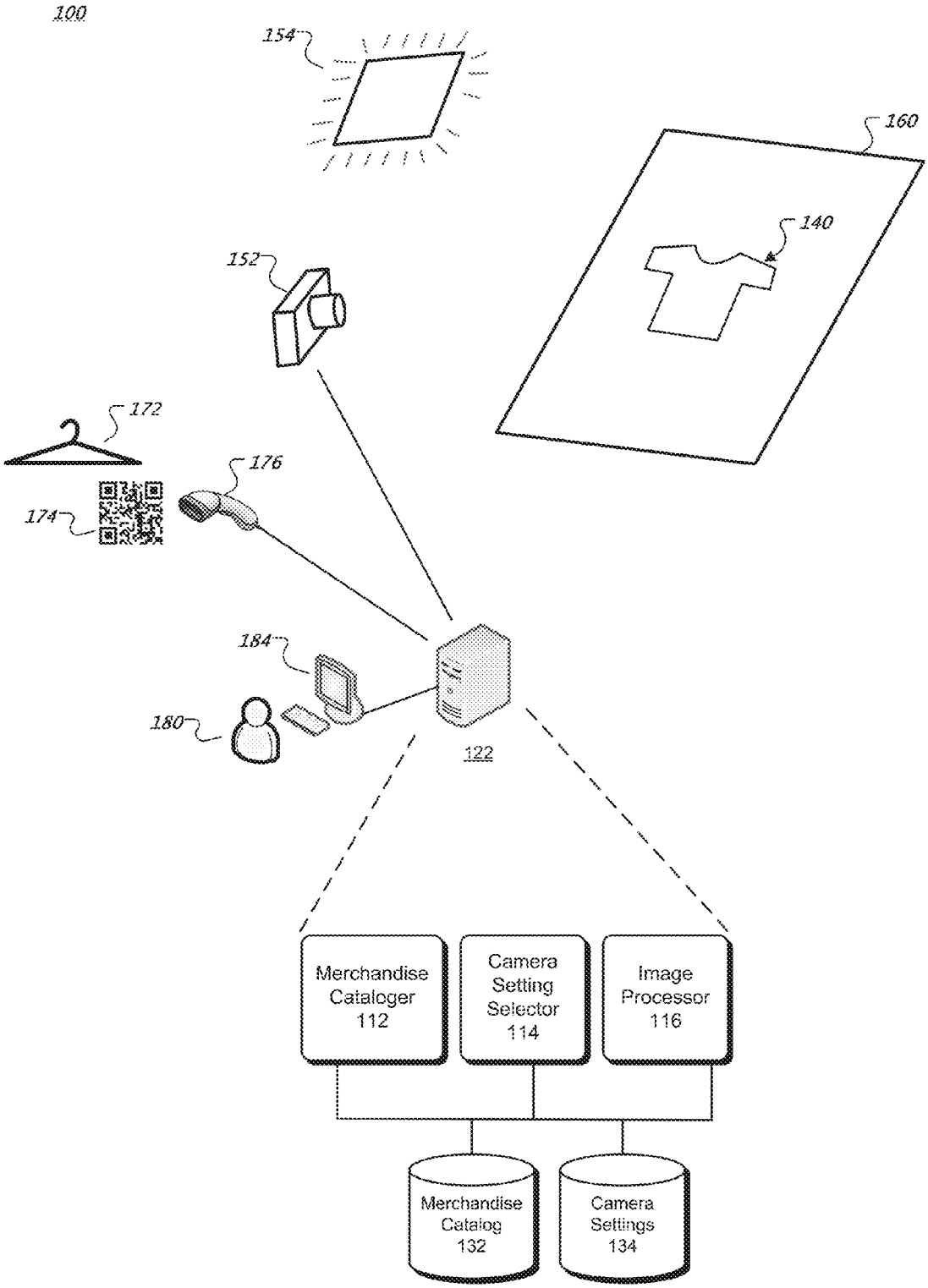

100
154
160
140
152
172
176
174
184
180
122
Merchandise Cataloger 112
Camera Setting Selector 114
Image Processor 116
Merchandise Catalog 132
Camera Settings 134

FIG. 1

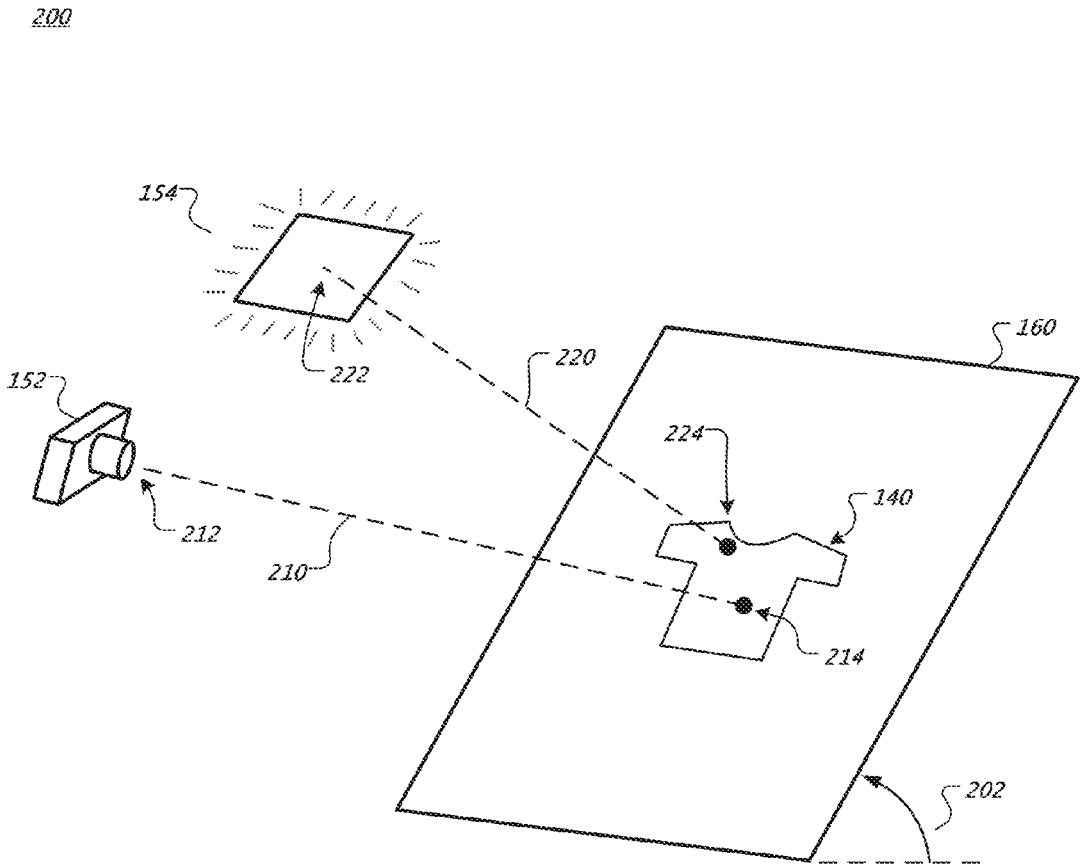


FIG. 2

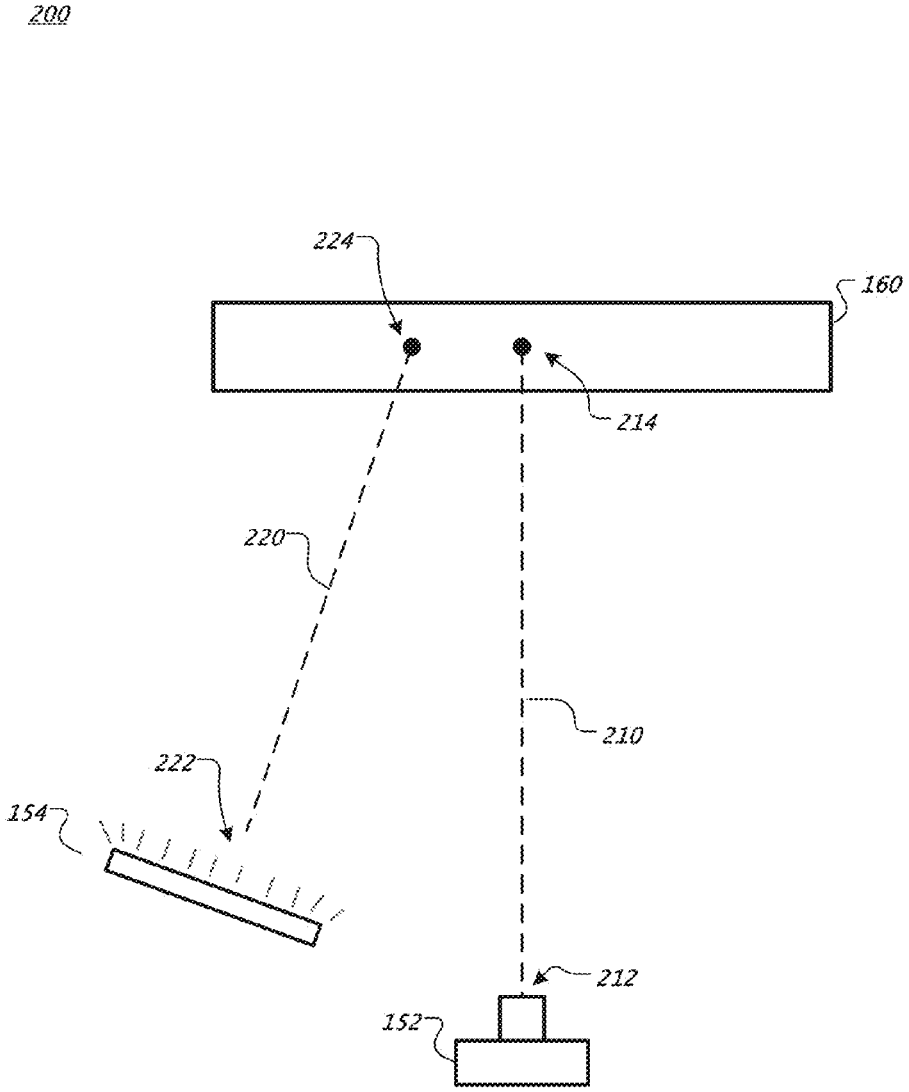


FIG. 3

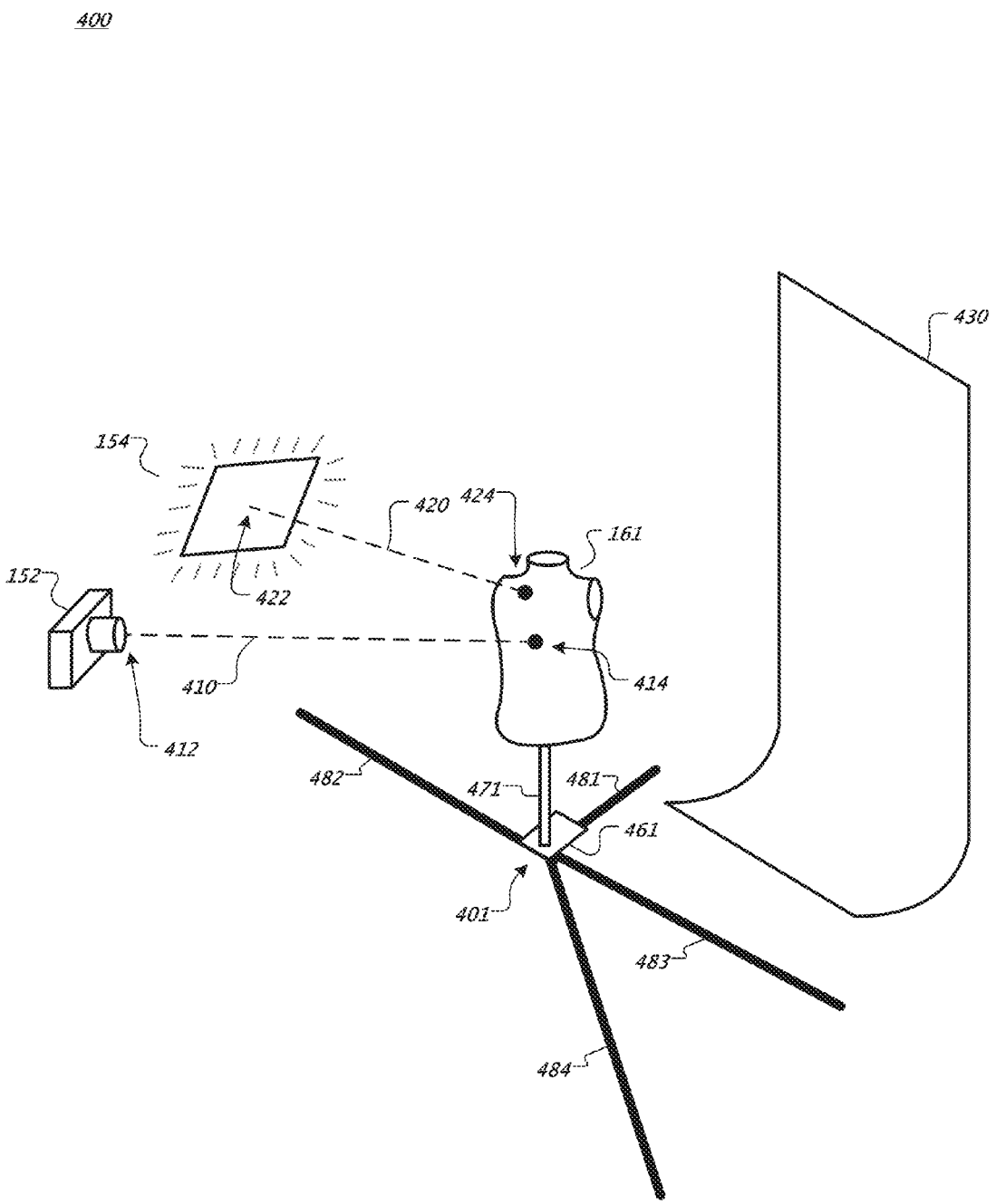

400
430
154
420
424
161
152
422
410
414
412
482
471
481
461
401
483
484

FIG. 4

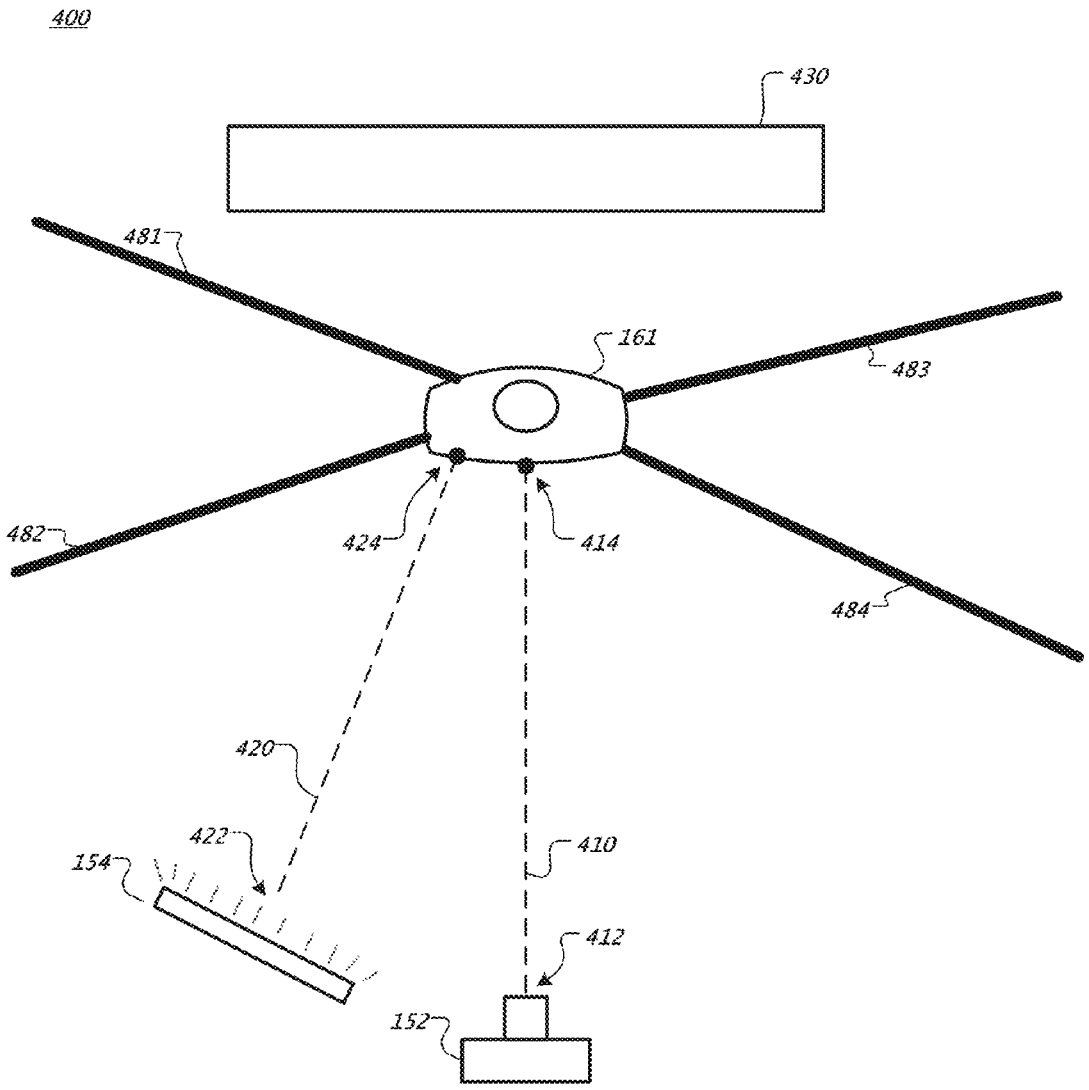


FIG. 5

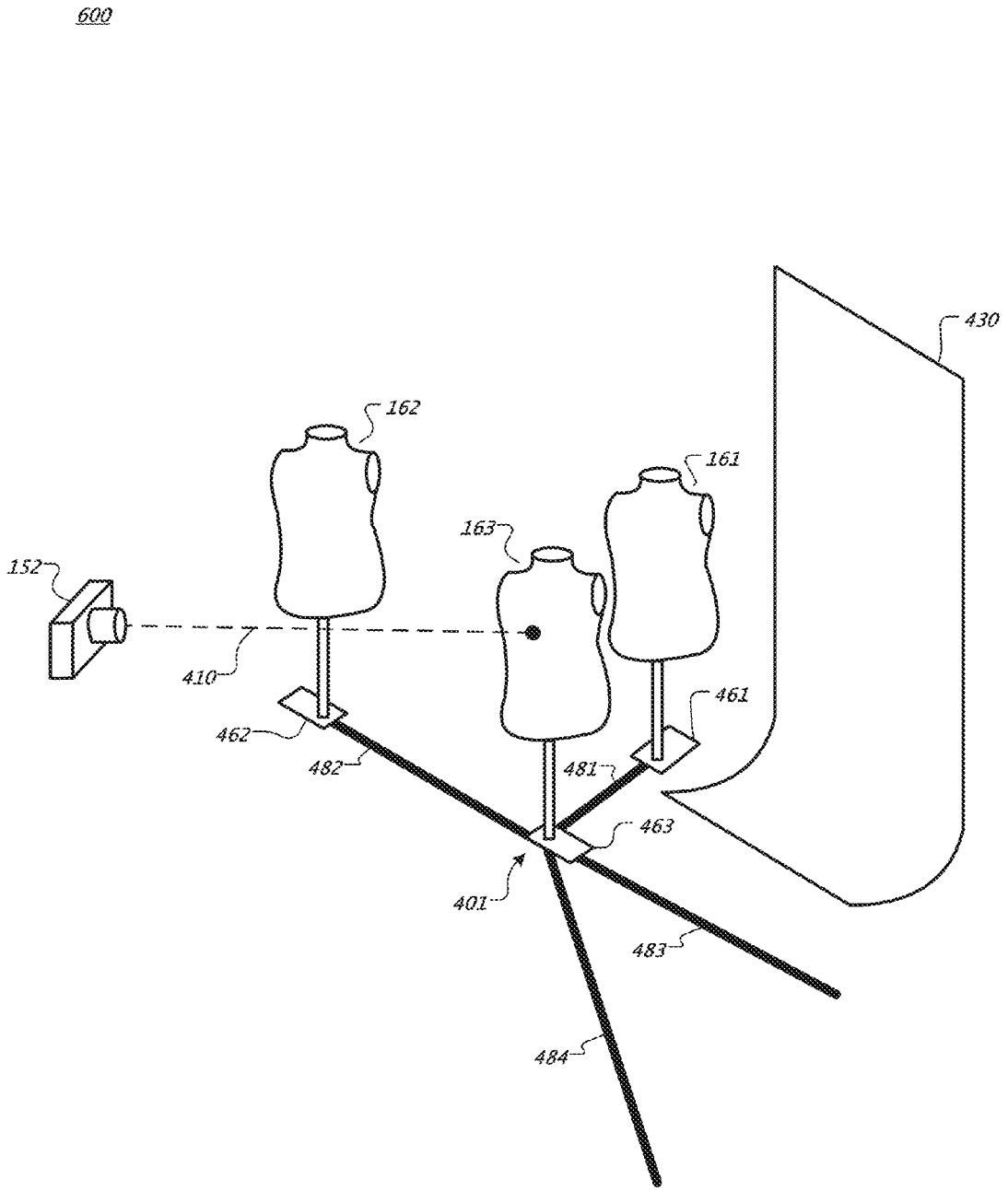


FIG. 6

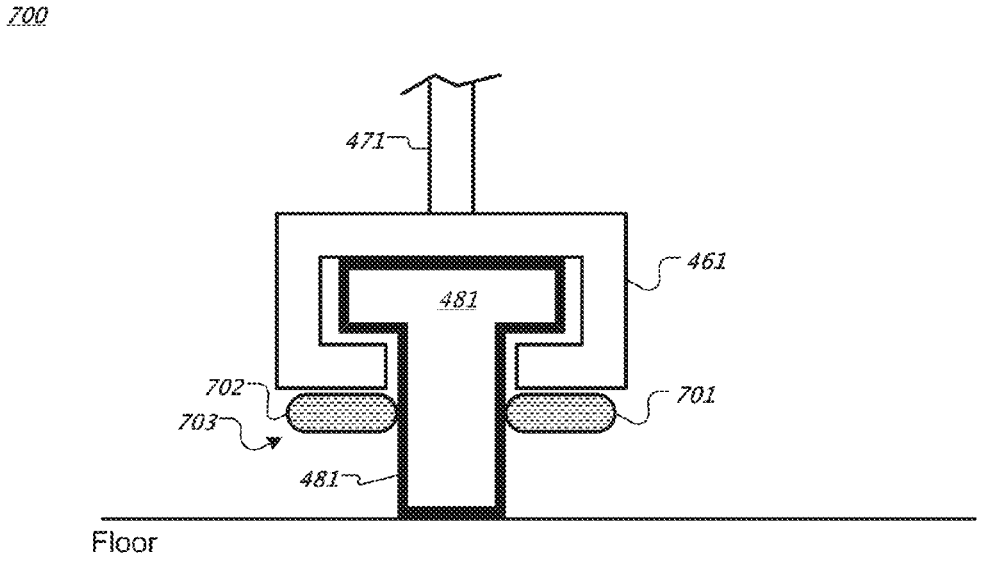

700
471
461
481
702
703
701
481
Floor

FIG. 7A

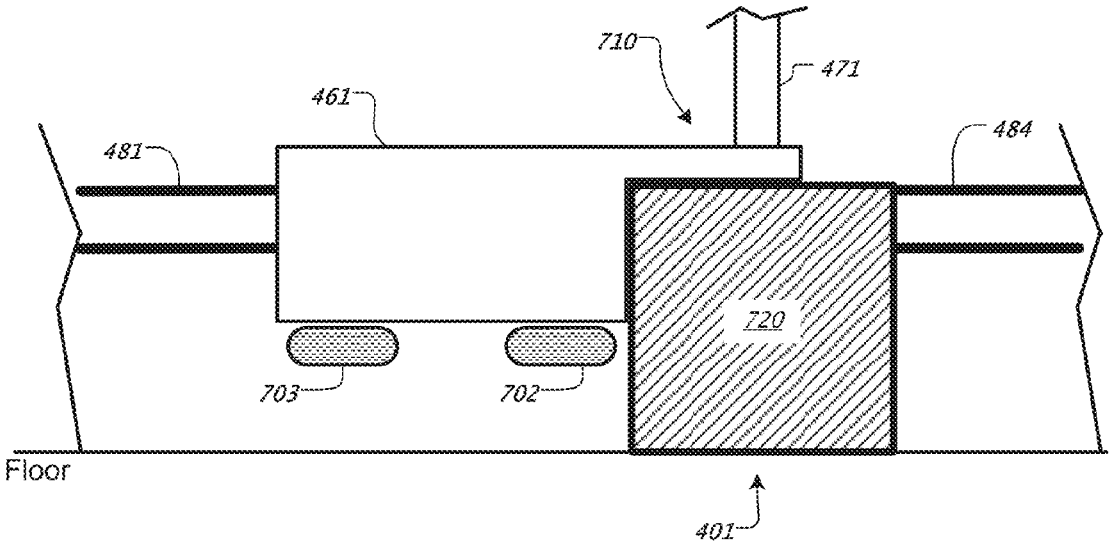

710
471
461
481
484
720
703
702
Floor
401

FIG. 7B

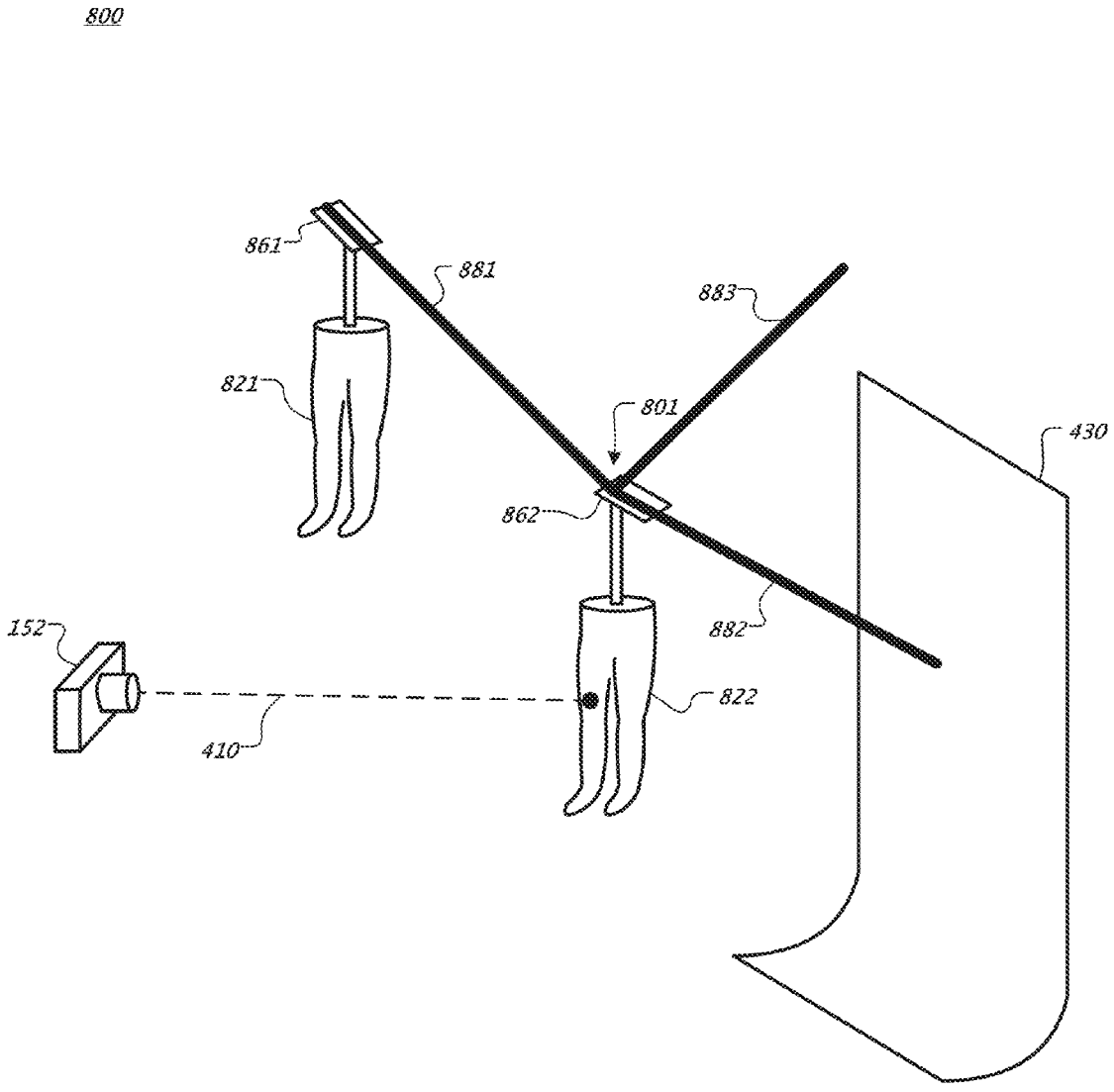


FIG. 8

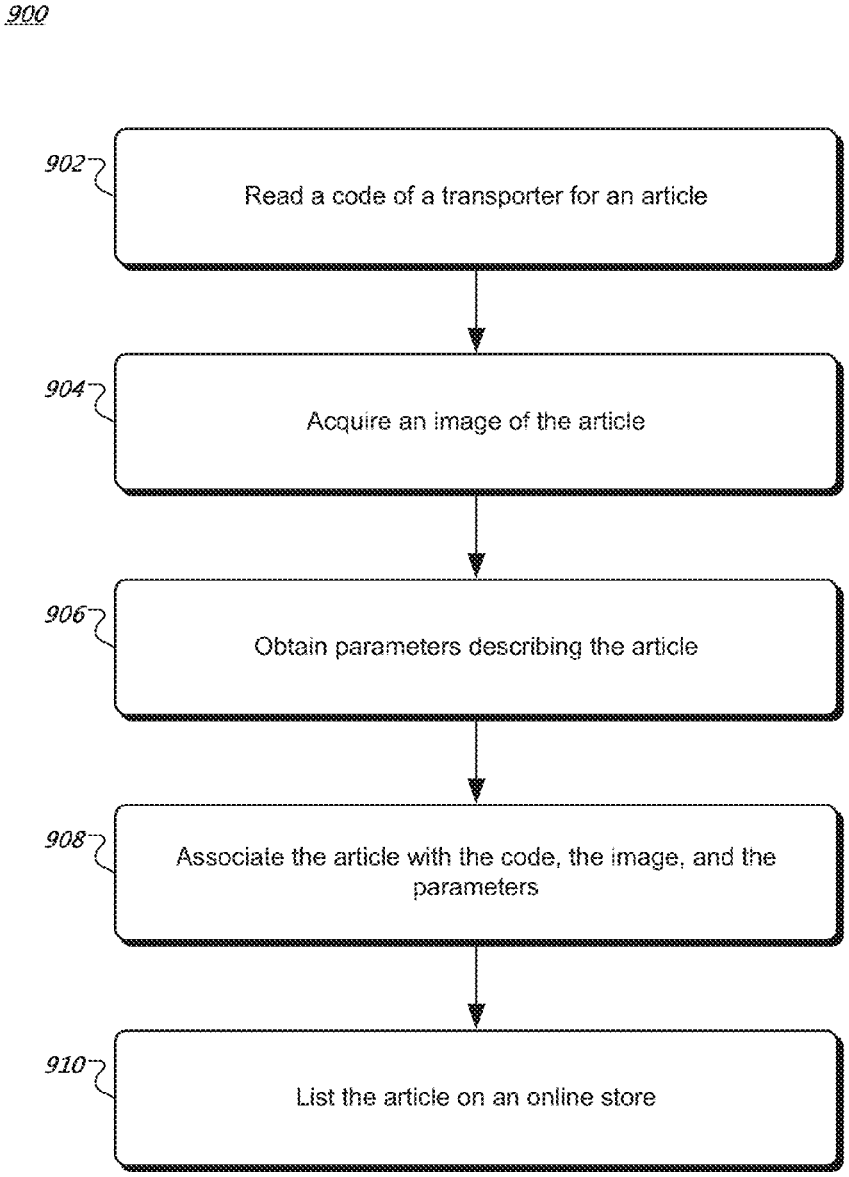

900
902
Read a code of a transporter for an article
904
Acquire an image of the article
906
Obtain parameters describing the article
908
Associate the article with the code, the image, and the parameters
910
List the article on an online store

FIG. 9

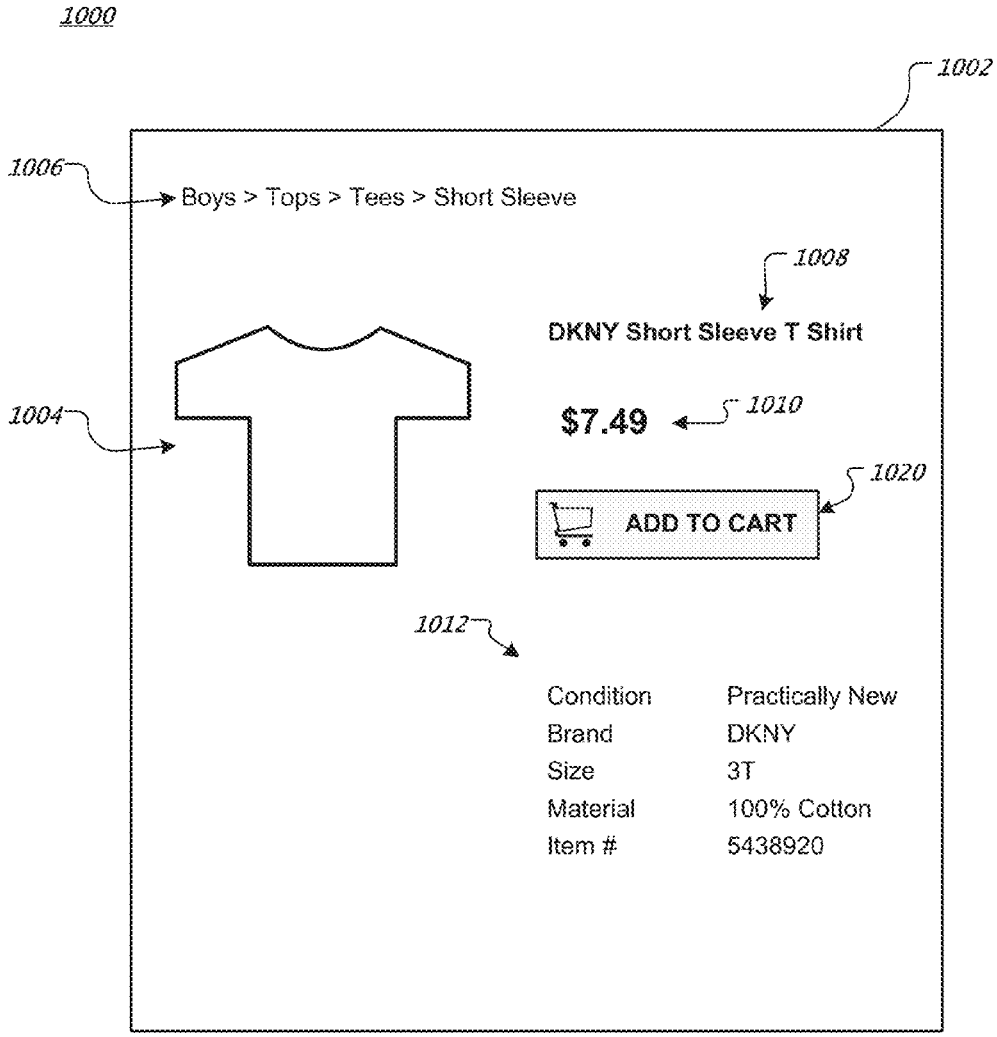

1000
1002
1006
Boys > Tops > Tees > Short Sleeve
1008
DKNY Short Sleeve T Shirt
1004
$7.49
1010
1020
ADD TO CART
1012
Condition Practically New
Brand DKNY
Size 3T
Material 100% Cotton
Item # 5438920

FIG. 10

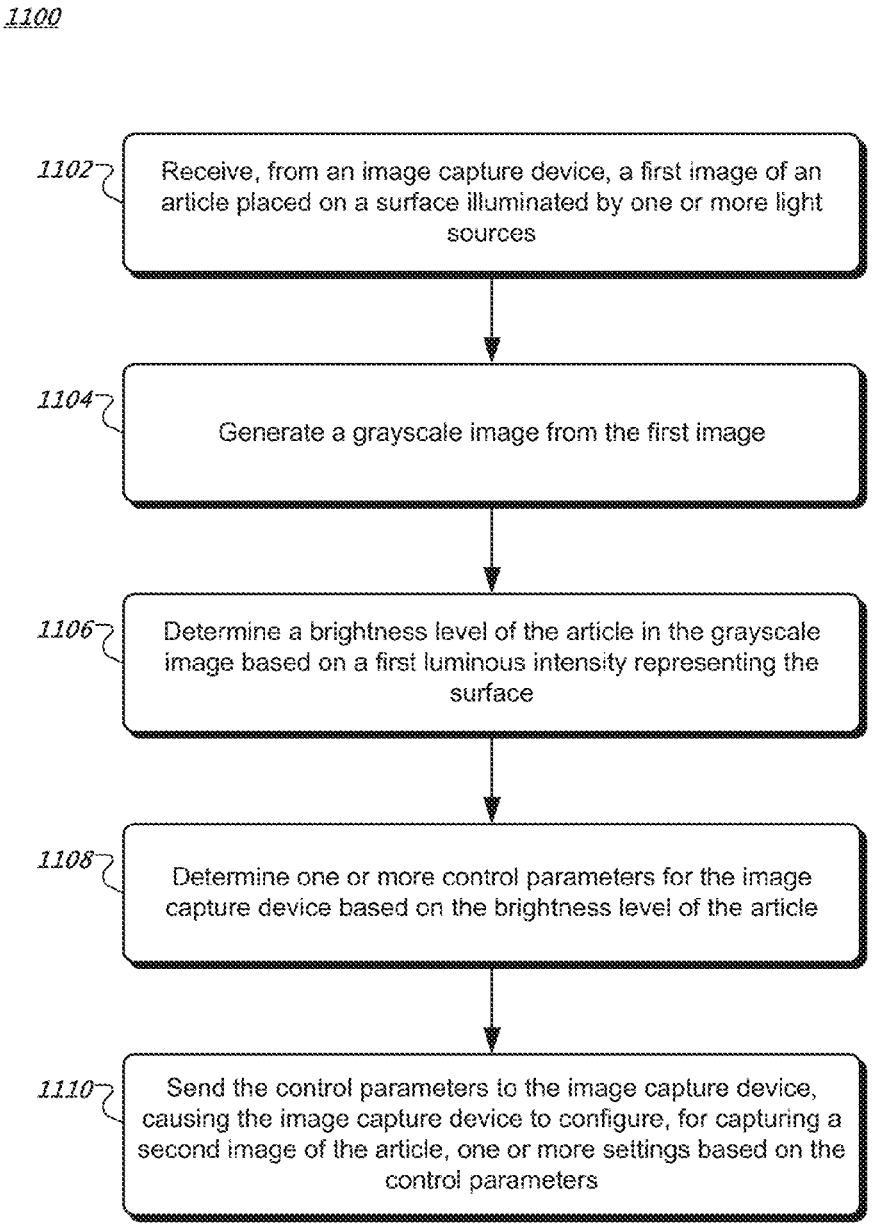

1100
1102
Receive, from an image capture device, a first image of an article placed on a surface illuminated by one or more light sources
1104
Generate a grayscale image from the first image
1106
Determine a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the surface
1108
Determine one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article
1110
Send the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters

FIG. 11

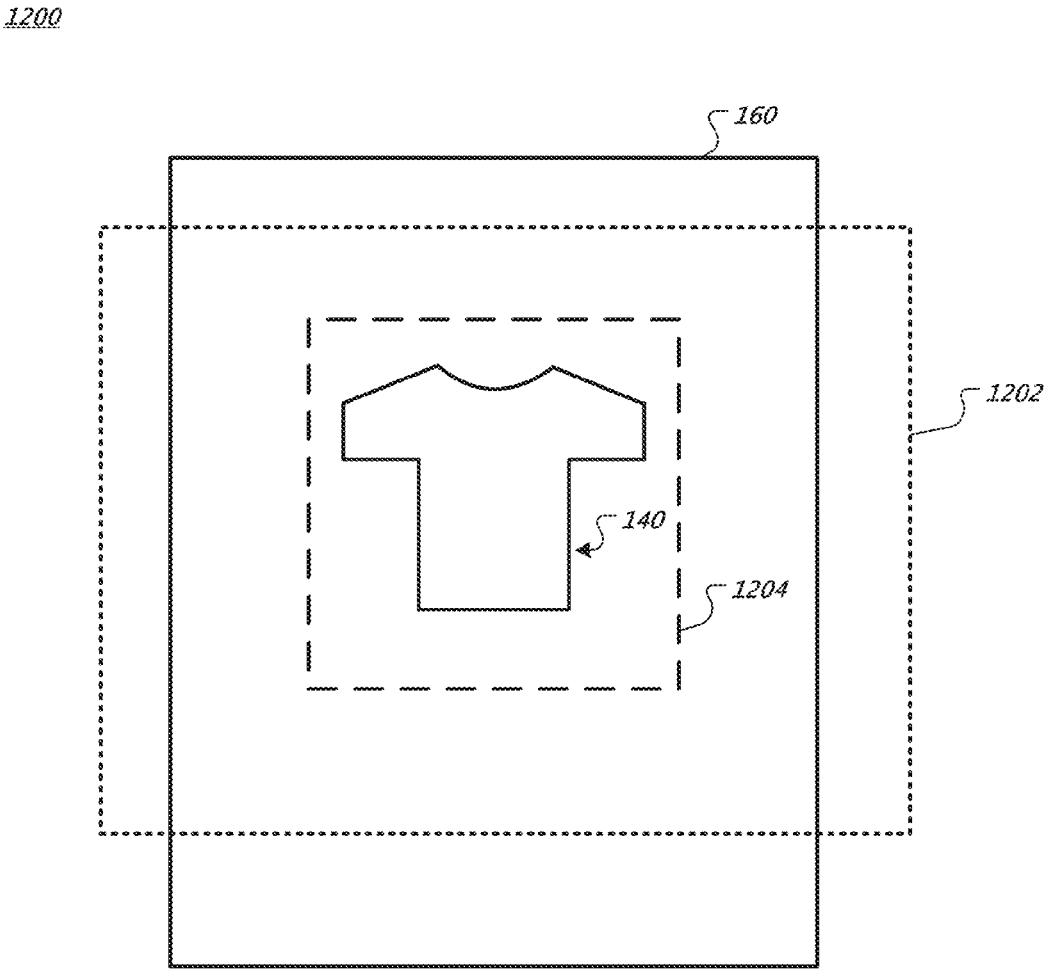


FIG. 12

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING MERCHANDISE

BACKGROUND

This specification relates to merchandising technology and, more particularly, cataloging clothing items.

Merchandising products to retail customers can include activities in selecting, pricing, and cataloging products, and displaying products in physical or online retail storefronts. Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from a seller over the Internet using a web browser or other application. An online shop can evoke the physical analogy of buying products or services at a bricks-and-mortar retailer or shopping center.

SUMMARY

In general, one aspect of the subject matter described in this specification can be embodied in a studio arrangement comprising a plurality of article transports, each article transport having a respective machine-readable code for tracking an article, an image capture device located at a first position on an axis wherein the image capture device is configured to capture images of articles placed on a surface wherein the axis intersects the surface at a second position, one or more light sources each positioned along a respective second axis that intersects the surface at a respective position wherein each light source is configured to illuminate articles placed on the surface, and a system comprising one or more data processing apparatus, the system configured to, for each of a plurality of articles, perform operations comprising: reading the code of a respective one of the transports, the transport being separate from the surface, in response to reading the code, causing the image capture device to acquire an image of the article, associating the article with the code, the image, and one or more parameters that describe the respective article, and listing the article on an online store wherein the listing comprises the image of the article and one or more of the parameters.

These and other aspects can optionally include one or more of the following features. The operations can further comprise determining a price and a payout for the article based on, at least, the parameters, and associating the price and the payout with the article, wherein the listing further comprises the price of the article. The operations can further comprise cropping the image of the article based on a distance between the first and second positions and dimensions of the surface. The operations can further comprise removing artifacts that appear on the surface from the image. The parameters can comprise one or more of: gender, age, brand, size, category, material type, inseam, skirt length, patent cut, waist style, shoe style, bag style, and a description of a flaw. An article can be an article of clothing, a bag, an accessory, or shoes. The surface can be a plane. The surface can be a three-dimensional form resembling a human torso. The machine-readable code can be a one or more of a two-dimensional bar code, a three-dimensional bar code, a quick response code, a radio-frequency identification tag, and one or more symbols. The aspect can further comprise a conveyance configured to convey transports from a first location where the surface is located to a second location. The aspect can further comprise determining a size of the article based on a distance between the first and second positions. The article can be an article of clothing, and a size of the article can be sleeve length, waist size, chest size, pant leg length, or pant inseam length.

In general, another aspect of the subject matter described in this specification can be embodied in a studio arrangement comprising a plurality of paths having a common termination point wherein none of the paths are parallel to another, a plurality of forms each comprising a respective conveyance that is slidably engaged with a different one of the paths such that each form can slide along the path to the termination point, a background comprising a white surface, the background located behind the termination point, an image capture device located at a first position on an axis that intersects a form at a second position when the form is positioned at the termination point, and one or more light sources each aimed at the background and positioned in front of the termination point.

These and other aspects can optionally include one or more of the following features. The image capture device can be located behind the light sources. Each path can comprise a respective raised rail. Each path can comprise a respective channel. Each conveyance can comprise a receptacle for the rail. A particular form can be a mannequin or a dress form. Each path can comprise a respective suspended rail. A particular path can be straight. At least two of the paths can form an angle at the termination point that is less than 45 degrees.

In general, yet another aspect of the subject matter described in this specification can be embodied in methods that include the actions of receiving, from an image capture device, a first image of an article and a background surface, the background surface being illuminated by one or more light sources, generating a grayscale image from the first image, determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface, determining one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article, and sending the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters. Receiving, generating, determining, and sending can be performed by one or more computer processors. Other embodiments of this aspect include corresponding systems, apparatus, and computer programs.

These and other aspects can optionally include one or more of the following features. The aspect can further comprise receiving, from the image capture device, the second image of the article, identifying an outline of the article in the second image, and creating a third image by, based on the brightness level of the article, replacing one or more pixels in the second image that are outside the outline with one or more background pixels representing a specific background for the article in the third image. Determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface can comprise determining, in the gray scale image, a number of particular pixels that each has a second luminous intensity being within least a specified threshold from the first luminous intensity, and determining a brightness level of the article based on a ratio between the number of the particular pixels and a total number of pixels in the grayscale image. The grayscale image can have an area smaller than the first image's area. A particular control parameter can be configured to adjust one or more settings in sensitivity, exposure time, focal length, or aperture size. The first image can be a still image of a current live view of the image capture device.

Particular implementations of the subject matter described in this specification can be implemented to realize one or more of the following advantages. The studio arrangement described herein includes a plurality of article transports,

each transport having a respective machine-readable code for tracking a respective article. The studio arrangement also includes an image capture device for capturing images of an article placed on a surface and illuminated by one or more light sources. The studio arrangement also includes a computer system for automatically cataloging articles. An operator can initiate cataloging a particular article by placing the article on the surface and scan a transport's code using a code reader. The computer system reads the code scanned by the operator and causes the image capture device to acquire an image of the article. The computer system can create a catalog entry for the article by associating the article with the code, the image and parameters describing the article, and list the article on an online store based on the catalog entry.

The other studio arrangement described herein includes a plurality of paths having a common termination point wherein none of the paths are parallel to another. The studio arrangement includes a plurality of mannequins each comprising a conveyance that is slidably engaged with a different one of the paths. The studio arrangement also includes a background behind the termination point, an image capture device positioned in front of the common termination point and pointing to a mannequin positioned at the termination point, and one or more light sources each aimed at the background and positioned in front of the common termination point. In the studio arrangement, a mannequin can be positioned at the common termination point for image capturing by the image capture device. When a mannequin is not in use for image capturing, the mannequin can be slid along its respective path away from the common termination point and thus out of sight of the image capture device.

The system described herein improves image quality of a photograph of an article and a background surface taken by a camera by automatically setting control parameters of the camera based on contrast between the article and the background surface. The system receives, from the camera, a first image of a live view of the article and the background surface, and generates a grayscale image from the first image. The system determines a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface. The system determines one or more control parameters for the camera based on the brightness level of the article. The system sends the control parameters to the camera, causing the camera to configure, for taking a photograph of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters.

The details of one or more implementations of the subject matter described in this specification are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below. Other features, aspects, and advantages of the subject matter will become apparent from the description, the drawings, and the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** illustrates an example studio arrangement for merchandising clothing articles.

FIGS. **2** and **3** illustrate an example arrangement for image capturing in a studio for merchandising clothing articles.

FIGS. **4** and **5** illustrate another example arrangement for image capturing using a mannequin in a studio for merchandising clothing articles.

FIG. **6** illustrates an example arrangement for image capturing using multiple paths conveying multiple mannequins in a studio for merchandising clothing articles.

FIGS. **7**A and **7**B illustrate an example conveyance supporting a mannequin.

FIG. **8** illustrates an example arrangement for image capturing using multiple suspended rails conveying multiple mannequins in a studio for merchandising clothing articles.

FIG. **9** is a flowchart of an example method for merchandising a clothing article.

FIG. **10** is an example web page for listing a clothing article for sale online.

FIG. **11** is a flow chart of an example method for photographing merchandise.

FIG. **12** illustrates an area of a camera's live view and another area including an article being photographed by the camera.

Like reference numbers and designations in the various drawings indicate like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Particular implementations of the subject matter described in this specification describe a studio for merchandising clothing. The studio includes arrangements and systems for photographing and cataloging clothing items, as further described below.

FIG. **1** illustrates an example studio arrangement **100** for merchandising clothing articles. The studio **100** comprises an image capture device **152** for capturing images of an article **140**. The image capture device **152** can be a camera, camcorder, a video camera that can capture still or moving images. Other types of image capture devices are possible. The article **140** is an object that can be photographed. An article **140** can be, for example, an article of clothing, a bag or purse, shoes, or an accessory (e.g., a necklace, scarf). The article **140** can be placed on a surface **160**. The surface **160** can be a flat or curved surface. The surface **160** can be of white color. Other colors of the surface **160** are possible.

A light source **154** illuminates the article **140** for image capturing by the image capture device **152**. The light source **154** can comprise one or more light bulbs, light tubes, or light-emitting diode (LED) light panels. Other types of light sources **154** are possible. Additional light sources can be used to illuminate the article **140**.

The studio arrangement **100** has a plurality of article transports for transporting and tracking articles. An article transport can be a cloth hanger, box, or bag. Other examples of an article transport are possible. More particularly, the article transport **172** is associated with a machine-readable code **174** for tracking an article carried by the article transport **172**. For instance, the machine-readable code **174** can be a two or three-dimensional bar code, a quick-access (QR) code, or a radio-frequency identification tag that is attached to (or integrated with) the article transport **172**. Other types of machine-readable codes are possible. The machine-readable code **174** can be read by a reader **175**, such as a barcode reader or a radio-frequency identifier reader. After one or more images are taken of the article **140** by the image capture device **152**, the article **140** can be placed on or in an article transport **172**. The article **140** together with the article transport **172** then can be stored in a warehouse, for example. In some implementations, article transports can be moved to a warehouse with their own transporting mechanism such as using a cart, or a hanging track leading to the warehouse.

A computer system **122** provides functionality for cataloging clothing articles. The computer system **122** comprises one or more data processing apparatus, software components that execute on the data processing apparatus, and databases that can be deployed at the same or different geographic locations, for example. The computer system **122** software components comprise a merchandise cataloger **112**, camera setting selec-

tor **114**, and image processor **116**. The software components can comprise subcomponents that can execute on the same or on different individual data processing apparatus. The computer system **122** databases comprise a merchandise catalog database **132** and camera settings database **134**. The databases can reside in one or more physical storage systems. The software components and data will be further described below.

In the studio arrangement **100** of FIG. **1**, the image capture device **152** can communicate with the computer system **122** through a wired connection (e.g., based on Universal Serial Bus or USB protocol) or a wireless connection (e.g., based on Bluetooth or Wi-Fi protocol). Similarly, the reader **176** can communicate with the computer system **122** through a wired or wireless connection. The computer system **122** can access functionalities of the image capture device **152** and the reader **176** via one or more software components, such as a device driver or an application program interface (API).

A user **180** (e.g., an operator of the studio) can access the computer system **122** through user interface devices **184** such as a display and a keyboard or a microphone. Other user interface devices are possible.

FIGS. **2** and **3** illustrate an example studio arrangement **200** for image capturing in the studio **100** illustrated in FIG. **1**. FIG. **2** is a perspective view of the example arrangement for image capturing. In FIG. **2**, the article **140** such as a T-shirt is placed on the surface **160**. The surface **160** can be arranged at an oblique angle **202** from the ground, for example. In this way, the T-shirt can be placed in a position similarly as draped on a person, while the inclined surface **160** can provide enough friction for holding the T-shirt in place for image capturing.

The image capture device **152** can point to the surface **160** along an axis **210** at a position **212**, for example. The axis **210** intersects the surface **160** at a position **214**. The light source **154** can point to the surface **160** along an axis **220** at a position **222**, for example. The axis **220** intersects the surface **160** at a position **224**. The position **214** and **224** can be at the same or different locations on the surface **160**. One or more additional light sources can point to the surface **160** along respective axes that intersect with the surface **160** at respective positions.

FIG. **3** is a top view of the example arrangement **200** for image capturing as illustrated in FIG. **2**. As described in reference to FIG. **2**, the image capture device can point to the surface **160** along the axis **210**. The light source **154** can point to the surface **160** along the axis **220**. Here, the light source **154** and the image capture device **152** are at the same side (in front of) the surface **160**. The axis **220** can be at an oblique angle to the axis **210**, for example. In other implementations, the axis **220** can be in parallel to the axis **210**. The light source **154** can be closer to or farther away from the surface **160** as compared to the image capture device **152**.

FIGS. **4** and **5** illustrate another example studio arrangement **400** for image capturing using a mannequin in the studio arrangement **100** illustrated in FIG. **1**. FIG. **4** is a perspective view of the studio arrangement **100** using a form. Different types of forms are possible such as, for example, a mannequin, a dress form, or a form that does not resemble a portion of a human body. A form **161** has a three-dimensional surface that resembles a human or a particular part of a human body (e.g., a head, hand, arm, shoulder, upper body, lower body). In one implementation, the form **161** can be a cloth hanger. The article **140** can be placed on the form **161** for image capturing. For instance, a dress can be draped over the form **161** for image capturing. By way of further illustration, a bag can be hung on a shoulder of the form **161** for image capturing.

The image capture device **152** can point to the form **161** along an axis **410** at a position **412**, for example. The axis **410** intersects the form **161** at a position **414** (or at another position on the form **161**). The light source **154** can point to the form **161** along an axis **420** at a position **422**, for example. The axis **420** intersects the form **161** at a position **424**. The position **414** and **424** can be at the same or different locations on the form **161**. One or more additional light sources can point to the form **161** along respective axes that intersect with the mannequin **161** at respective positions.

FIG. **5** is a top view of the example studio arrangement **400**. As described in reference to FIG. **4**, the image capture devices **152** can point to the form **161** along the axis **410**. The light source **154** can point to the form **161** along the axis **420**. Here, the light source **154** and the image capture device **152** are at the same side (e.g., in front of) of the form **161**. The axis **420** can be at an oblique angle to the axis **410**, for example. In some implementations, the axis **420** is in parallel to the axis **410**. The light source **154** can be closer to or farther away from the form **161** as compared to the image capture device **152**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **4** and **5**, a background surface **430** can provide a background for capturing images of the article **140** on the form **161**. The background surface **430** can have the same or different color as the form **161**. For instance, both background surface **430** and the form **161** can have white color. Other combinations of colors of the form **161** and the background surface **430** are possible. The background surface **430** can be placed behind of the form **161** opposite to the image capture device **152** and one or more light sources such as the light source **154**. The light sources can aim, directly or indirectly, at the background surface **430**.

In some implementations, a person (a human model) can be in place of the form **161** for image capturing in the example studio arrangement illustrated in FIGS. **4** and **5**.

As illustrated in FIG. **4**, the form **161** can be coupled to a conveyance **461**. In some implementations, the form **161** is coupled to the conveyance **461** by way of a support **471** (e.g., a pole). The conveyance **461** is integrated with the form **161**. In further implementations, the form **161** can be rotatable on the support **471** such that an appropriate side of the form can face the image capture device **152**. For instance, with a dress draped over the form **161**, photographs can be taken for both front and back sides of the dress by rotating the form **161**. Or a video clip can be taken for the dress while the form **161** rotating for 360 degrees.

In some implementations, the conveyance **461** is moveable along a path **481** such as a track or a channel. Other types of paths are possible. For image capturing by the image capture device **152**, the form **161** is moved using the conveyance in front of the image capture device **152** (i.e., intersecting the axis **410**), to a termination point **401** of the path **481**. When the form **161** is not used for image capturing by the image capture device **152**, the form **161** can be moved using the conveyance toward another end of the path **481**. In this way, the form **161** can be "out of sight" of the image capture device **152** when the form **161** is not in use for image capturing. In some implementations movement of the form using a conveyance can be performed manually by a person pushing or pulling the form which causes the conveyance to travel along a path in the direction of the force. In further implementations the conveyance is motorized and can automatically move the form. In yet further implementations, the path has an apparatus (e.g., a cable or an internal conveyance) that couples with the conveyance and can automatically move the conveyance to a given position.

In various implementations, the studio can have multiple paths conveying multiple forms, each path can be used by a respective conveyance **461**. FIG. **6** illustrates an example studio arrangement **600** for image capturing using multiple paths for conveying multiple forms in the studio illustrated in FIG. **1**. As illustrated in FIG. **6**, the path **481** can convey the form **161**, the path **482** can convey the form **162**, and the path **483** can convey the form **163**, and so on. Each form is coupled to a respective conveyance (e.g., **461**, **462**, **463**) that is itself engaged with a respective path. The paths **481**, **482**, **483**, and **484** can have a common termination point **401**. In one implementation, none of the paths **481**, **482**, **483**, and **484** is parallel to another path. In further implementations, at least two of the paths are collinear with each other. As illustrated in FIG. **6**, the form **163** is moved along the path **483** to the common termination point **401**, for image capturing by the image capture device **152**. Note that the form **163** intersects the axis **410**—i.e., the form **163** is "within sight" of the image capture device **152**. Meanwhile, the form **161** can be moved along the path **481**, away from the termination point **401** (i.e., out of sight of the image capture device **152**), when the form **161** is not in use for image capturing by the image capture device **152**. The form **162** can be moved along the path **482**, away from the termination point **401**, when the form **162** is not in use for image capturing by the image capture device **152**. In this way, an operator of the studio can use the form **161** or **162** as a staging area for placing an article on the form or removing an article from the form.

FIGS. **7**A and **7**B illustrate an example conveyance for supporting a form. FIG. **7**A is a cross-sectional view of the conveyance **461**. FIG. **7**B is a side view of the conveyance **461**. As illustrated in FIGS. **7**A and **7**B, the rails (e.g., **481**, **484**) are raised above the floor. The conveyance can comprise a receptacle that wraps around a path comprising a rail. The rail can have various shapes including a "T" shape, "I" shape, and "U" shape, for example. Other rail shapes are possible. In some implementations the rail is raised above the studio floor and in other implementations the rail is embedded in the studio floor. In further implementations, the rail is attached to the studio ceiling or embedded in the studio ceiling. The conveyance **461** can include rolling conveyances such as wheels (e.g., **701**, **702**, **703**) that are slide-ably engaged with the path **481**, for example. In some implementations a wheel is implemented as one or more ball bearings. A block **720** can be placed at the common termination point **401** of the paths that can stop each conveyance at the common termination point **401**. The conveyance **461** can have an extension portion **701** such that the form **161** can be positioned at the common termination point **401**.

In FIGS. **4**, **5**, **6**, **7**A, and **7**B, the paths are placed at a floor of the studio. Other placements of paths supporting forms are possible. For instance, the paths can be suspended rails placed on or near a ceiling of the studio. FIG. **8** illustrates an example arrangement for image capturing using multiple suspended rails conveying multiple mannequins in a studio for merchandising clothing articles. As illustrated in FIG. **8**, the suspended rail **881** can convey the form **821**, the suspended rail **882** can convey the form **822**, and so on. Each form is suspended to a respective conveyance (e.g., **861**, **862**) that is itself engaged with a respective suspended rail. The suspended rails **881**, **882**, and **883** can have a common termination point **801**. A form (e.g., **822**) can be moved (along the corresponding suspended rail **882**) to the common termination point **801** between a background (e.g., the background surface **430**) and the image capture device **152** for image capturing, and moved away from the common termination point **801** when not in use for image capturing. A form can be a pant mannequin, for example. A pant mannequin suspended from its respective suspended rail can be more convenient for an operator to place a pant or skirt over the mannequin, without the interference of an underlying pole such as the pole **471** illustrated in FIG. **4**.

The user **180** can place the article **140** on the surface **160** or on the form **161**, and use the image capture device **152** and the computer system **122** to automatically photograph and catalog the article **140**. The user can initiate photographing and cataloging the article **140** by obtaining the article transport **172** (for the article **140**), and scanning the machine-readable code **174** with the reader **176**, as further described below in reference to FIG. **9**.

FIG. **9** is a flow chart of an example method for merchandising the article **140**. The method can be implemented using the studio arrangements and the software components executing on one or more data processing apparatus that are part of the computer system **122** described earlier. The method starts by reading the machine-readable code **174** of the article transport **172** for the article **140** (**902**). For instance, the merchandise cataloger **112** can obtain the code **174** via a device driver of the reader **176**, when the user **180** scans the code **174** with the reader **176**. Here, the transport **172** is separated from the surface **160**. In response to reading the code **174**, the merchandise cataloger **112** can access the image capture device **152**, and cause the image capture device **152** to acquire an image (e.g., a photograph, or a video clip) of the article **140** (**904**). If the user **180** wants to take another image of the article **140**, the user **180** can use the reader **176** to scan the code **174** again, causing the image capture device **152** to take another image of the article **140** and provide the image to the merchandise cataloger **112**.

The merchandise cataloger **112** can obtain parameters describing the article **140**, for example, from the user **180** via the user interface devices **184** (**906**). For instance, the user **180** can inspect the article **140** and input parameters describing the article **140** including, among other things, brand, gender, size, category (e.g., tops, bottoms, long sleeve, short sleeve, hat, shoes), material type (e.g., 100% cotton, 90% polyester/10% spandex), inseam length, skirt length, pant cut (e.g., straight, boot cut), waist style (e.g., on the waist, low), shoe style (e.g., boots, sneakers, sandals), bag style (e.g., hand bag, shoulder bag), dress style (e.g., formal gown, summer dress), or a description of a flaw (e.g., stains, holes, missing buttons).

The parameters describing the article **140** can also include a color of the article **140**. The image processor **116** can determine a color of the article **140** by analyzing the image of the article **140**, and provide the color to the merchandise cataloger **112**. In addition, the image processor **116** can analyze the image of the article **140** and determine a size of the article **140** based on the distance between the image capture device **152** and the surface **160** (e.g., the distance between the positions **212** and **214** illustrated in FIG. **2**). For instance, with the distance between the image capture device **152** and the surface **160** held at a particular value, the image processor **116** can analyze an image taken by the image capture device **152** and determine a length between two particular points in the image, for example, by using a ruler or other indicia placed on the surface **160** as a calibration. With the distance between the image capture device **152** and the surface **160** held at the particular value, the image processor **116** then can analyze an image of the article **140** (e.g., a shirt, a pair of pants) taken by the image capture device **152** and determine a size (length) of the article **140** such as sleeve length, waist size, chest size, pant leg length, or pant inseam length. The image processor

116 can perform additional image processing and analysis operations, as will be further described later.

The merchandise cataloger **112** can associate the article **140** with the code **174**, the image, and the parameters describing the article **140** (**908**). For instance, the merchandise cataloger **112** can create a record (i.e., a catalog entry) including the code **174**, the image, and the parameters describing the article **140**, and store the record in the merchandise catalog database **132**.

The merchandise cataloger **112** can also determine a price for the article **140** based on, at least, the parameters describing the article **140**. For instance, the computer system **122** can store in the merchandise catalog database **132** one or more pricing tables. A pricing table can include brand tiers. Each tier can include a number of brands and a reference price. Each tier can also include additional reference prices based on the parameters (attributes) describing an article such as material and styles. The merchandise cataloger **112** can determine a price for the article **140** by looking up the pricing tables based on the article's brand and one or more attributes, and include the price in the record for the article **140**.

The article **140** may come from a consumer who wants to resale the article **140**. The merchandise cataloger **112** can determine a payout amount to the consumer based on, at least, the parameters of the article **140**. For instance, for a lower priced article (e.g., sandals, shorts, or an article with flows), the merchandise cataloger **112** can set a pre-determined amount (e.g., 50% of the price) as the payout to the consumer. For an expensive article (e.g., a formal gown), the merchandise cataloger **112** can designate the article as a consignment, and only provide a payout to the consumer when the article is sold.

After photographing and cataloging the article **140**, the merchandise cataloger **112** (or another software component of the computer system **122**) can list the article **140** on an online store (**910**). For instance, the merchandise catalog **112** can accessing the record of the article **140** stored in the merchandise catalog database **132** and create a web page for listing the article **140** for sale online. The listing can include the image and one or more of the parameters of the article **140**.

FIG. **10** is an example web page for listing the article **140** for sale online. The web page **1002** can include the image **1004** of the article **140**, a category **1006**, description **1008**, price **1010**, and additional parameters **1012**. The web page also includes a selectable icon **1020** for purchasing the article **140**.

Particular embodiments of the subject matter described in this specification include methods for improving quality of images taken for clothing articles. The methods can provide better image quality of a clothing article in a photograph taken by a camera by automatically adjusting the camera's setting before the photograph is taken, based on contrast between a clothing article and a background surface, as described below in reference to FIG. **11**.

FIG. **11** is a flow chart of an example method for photographing merchandise. The method can be implemented using the image capture device **152** and software components executing on one or more data processing apparatus that are part of the computer system **122** described earlier. The method starts when the image processor **116** receives, from the image capture device **152**, a first image of the article **140** and a background surface, such as the surface **160** illustrated in FIG. **2** (**1102**). The background surface can also include the background surface **430** and the mannequin **161** illustrated in FIG. **4**, when the article **140** is placed on the mannequin **161**. As described earlier, the background surface is illuminated by one or more light sources such as the light source **154**. The method can start when the user **180** scans the code **174** using the reader **176**, for example.

Here, a digitized image can comprise an array of pixel elements or pixels. Each pixel can be represented by a primary color or Red-Green-Blue (RGB) triplet (r, g, b), for example. Each value of the triplet can have a range indicating the luminous intensity of a particular primary color. For instance, a value of 0 indicates zero intensity, while a value of 255 indicates maximal intensity. In a color image, the three values in an RGB triplet of a pixel can have different values. For instance, (0, 0, 128) can represent a blue shade ("navy blue"). (255, 105, 180) can represent a pink shade. In a grayscale image, the three values in an RGB triplet of a pixel have the same value. For instance, (255, 255, 255) can represent white color. (0, 0, 0) can represent black color. An equal-value RGB triplet between the white and black color such as (100, 100, 100) or (195, 195, 195) can represent a particular gray shade. In addition to the RGB color space above, pixels in a digitized image can be represented in other color spaces such as HSL (hue-saturation-lightness) color space and HSV (hue-saturation-value) color space. Pixel representation in one color space can be transformed to pixel representation in another color space such that the resulting image is as similar as possible to the original image.

The first image can be a still image of a current live view of the image capture device **154**, for example. The first image can be a color image. The image processor **116** can generate a grayscale image from the first image (**1104**). The image processor **116** can generate a grayscale image form the first image (a color image) by converting each color pixel of the first image to a grayscale pixel. For instance, the image processor **116** can generate the grayscale image from the first image by using a bilateral filter such as Euclidean color filtering algorithm with a center color for the filtering being (200, 200, 200) in RGB (a light gray shade), and a filtering radius of 100.

FIG. **12** illustrates an area of a camera's live view and another area including an article being photographed by the camera. As illustrated in FIG. **12**, since the first image (a still image of a current live view of the image capture device **152**) may have a wide angle, an area **1202** of the first image can be much bigger than the article **140** and include unnecessary or unrelated area (e.g., area further away from the article **140**, or area outside the surface **160**). The grayscale image can have an area **1204** smaller than the area **1202**—i.e., by cropping the first image, but is sufficiently large to encompass the article **140** and a nearby portion of the surface **160**. The image processor **116** can crop the first image based on a distance between positions **212** and **214** of the axis **210** and a size of the surface **160** illustrated in FIG. **2**, for example. In this way, the article **140** will occupy a majority area in the grayscale image.

From the grayscale image, the image processor **116** can determine whether the article **140** is a dark object or a light object. Here, assuming the background surface is white, the image processor **116** can determine whether the article **140** is a dark or light object by determining a brightness level of the article **140** in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface (**1106**). For instance, the first luminous intensity representing the white background surface can be (255, 255, 255). The image processor **116** can determine a number of "bright" pixels in the grayscale image that each bright pixel has a respective luminous intensity being greater (brighter) than (10, 10, 10), or within (245, 245, 245) from the background surface's first luminous intensity (255, 255, 255). The image processor **116** can determine a brightness level (e.g., representing a dark

object or a light object) of the article **140** based on a ratio of the number of bright pixels to the total number of pixels in the grayscale image. For instance, since the article **140** occupies a majority area of the grayscale image (as illustrated in FIG. **12**), the image processor **116** can determine the article **140** is a light object if 95% of the pixels in the grayscale image are bright pixels. Otherwise, the image processor **116** can determine the article **140** is a dark object (or a "regular" object that can have enough contrast from the white background surface).

After determining the brightness level of the article **140**, the image processor **115** can determine one or more control parameters for the image capture device **152** based on the brightness level of the article **140** (**1108**). The control parameters can include film or sensor sensitivity or a corresponding International Organization for Standardization (ISO) speed value, exposure time (or shutter speed), focal length, and aperture size (often referred as f-number). Other control parameters are possible. For instance, if the article **140** has a brightness level as a light object, the image processor **115** can set the control parameters for the image capture device **152** as follows:

IsoSpeed="1000"
ExposureProgram="Manual"
ExposureTime="1/125"
FocalLength="28/1"
FNumber="28/1"

If the article **140** has a brightness level as a dark object, the image processor **115** can set the control parameters for the image capture device **152** as follows:

IsoSpeed="400"
ExposureProgram="Manual"
ExposureTime="1/60"
FocalLength="28/1"
FNumber="28/5"

Note here the focal length can be fixed, as the distance between the image capture device **152** and the article **140** (e.g., the distance between positions **212** and **214**) is already known in a given studio arrangement, such as the example arrangements illustrated in FIGS. **2-6**.

The image processor **116** can send the control parameters to the image capture device **152**. Base on the received control parameters, the image capture device **152** adjusts corresponding settings, and captures a second image of the article **140** based on the settings (**1110**). Adjustments of the control parameters can control the amount of light reaching the image sensor (e.g., a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor or CMOS image sensor) of the image capture device **152**, and provide better image quality of a light object on the white background surface (e.g., with a correct representation of the white background surface and better sharpness and details of the light object). In this way, image quality of the article **140** can be optimized for the brightness level (a dark or light object) of the article **140** given the white background surface.

Furthermore, the image processor **116** can adjust the second image (received from the image capture device **152**) to provide better contrasting background for the article **140**. The image processor **116** can first crop the second image such that the remaining area encompasses the article **140** and a nearby portion of the surface **160** (e.g., the area **1204** illustrated in FIG. **12**). The image processor **116** can determine a size the remaining area based on a distance between positions **212** and **214** of the axis **210** and a size of the surface **160** illustrated in FIG. **2**, for example. The image processor **116** can then identify an outline of the article **140** in the second image, for example, by using an edge detection algorithm. The image processor **116** can create a third image by, based on the brightness level of the article **140**, replacing pixels outside the outline of the article **140** in the second image with background pixels that represent a specific background in the third image. For instance, if the article **140** has a brightness level as a light object, the image processor **116** can fill the background in the third image with pixels with a light grade shade color—e.g., (225, 225, 225). If the article has a brightness level as a dark object, the image processor **116** can fill the background in the third image with white pixels—e.g., (255, 255, 255).

The image processor **116** can also remove artifacts (e.g., a stained spot, shadow) appearing in the third image by, for example, using an image smoothing algorithm (e.g., Gaussian smoothing).

The third image (a color image) then can be included in the record of the article **140** stored in the merchandise catalog database **132**, and used for online listing as described earlier.

Implementations of the subject matter and the operations described in this specification can be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, or in computer software, firmware, or hardware, including the structures disclosed in this specification and their structural equivalents, or in combinations of one or more of them. Implementations of the subject matter described in this specification can be implemented as one or more computer programs, i.e., one or more modules of computer program instructions, encoded on computer storage medium for execution by, or to control the operation of, data processing apparatus. Alternatively or in addition, the program instructions can be encoded on an artificially-generated propagated signal, e.g., a machine-generated electrical, optical, or electromagnetic signal, that is generated to encode information for transmission to suitable receiver apparatus for execution by a data processing apparatus. A computer storage medium can be, or be included in, a computer-readable storage device, a computer-readable storage substrate, a random or serial access memory array or device, or a combination of one or more of them. Moreover, while a computer storage medium is not a propagated signal, a computer storage medium can be a source or destination of computer program instructions encoded in an artificially-generated propagated signal. The computer storage medium can also be, or be included in, one or more separate physical components or media (e.g., multiple CDs, disks, or other storage devices).

The operations described in this specification can be implemented as operations performed by a data processing apparatus on data stored on one or more computer-readable storage devices or received from other sources.

The term "data processing apparatus" encompasses all kinds of apparatus, devices, and machines for processing data, including by way of example a programmable processor, a computer, a system on a chip, or multiple ones, or combinations, of the foregoing The apparatus can include special purpose logic circuitry, e.g., an FPGA (field programmable gate array) or an ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit). The apparatus can also include, in addition to hardware, code that creates an execution environment for the computer program in question, e.g., code that constitutes processor firmware, a protocol stack, a database management system, an operating system, a cross-platform runtime environment, a virtual machine, or a combination of one or more of them. The apparatus and execution environment can realize various different computing model infrastructures, such as web services, distributed computing and grid computing infrastructures.

A computer program (also known as a program, software, software application, script, or code) can be written in any form of programming language, including compiled or interpreted languages, declarative or procedural languages, and it

can be deployed in any form, including as a stand-alone program or as a module, component, subroutine, object, or other unit suitable for use in a computing environment. A computer program may, but need not, correspond to a file in a file system. A program can be stored in a portion of a file that holds other programs or data (e.g., one or more scripts stored in a markup language resource), in a single file dedicated to the program in question, or in multiple coordinated files (e.g., files that store one or more modules, sub-programs, or portions of code). A computer program can be deployed to be executed on one computer or on multiple computers that are located at one site or distributed across multiple sites and interconnected by a communication network.

The processes and logic flows described in this specification can be performed by one or more programmable processors executing one or more computer programs to perform actions by operating on input data and generating output. The processes and logic flows can also be performed by, and apparatus can also be implemented as, special purpose logic circuitry, e.g., an FPGA (field programmable gate array) or an ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit).

Processors suitable for the execution of a computer program include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors, and any one or more processors of any kind of digital computer. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read-only memory or a random access memory or both. The essential elements of a computer are a processor for performing actions in accordance with instructions and one or more memory devices for storing instructions and data. Generally, a computer will also include, or be operatively coupled to receive data from or transfer data to, or both, one or more mass storage devices for storing data, e.g., magnetic, magneto-optical disks, or optical disks. However, a computer need not have such devices. Moreover, a computer can be embedded in another device, e.g., a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a mobile audio or video player, a game console, a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver, or a portable storage device (e.g., a universal serial bus (USB) flash drive), to name just a few. Devices suitable for storing computer program instructions and data include all forms of non-volatile memory, media and memory devices, including by way of example semiconductor memory devices, e.g., EPROM, EEPROM, and flash memory devices;

magnetic disks, e.g., internal hard disks or removable disks; magneto-optical disks; and

CD-ROM and DVD-ROM disks. The processor and the memory can be supplemented by, or incorporated in, special purpose logic circuitry.

To provide for interaction with a user, implementations of the subject matter described in this specification can be implemented on a computer having a display device, e.g., a CRT (cathode ray tube) or LCD (liquid crystal display) monitor, for displaying information to the user and a keyboard and a pointing device, e.g., a mouse or a trackball, by which the user can provide input to the computer. Other kinds of devices can be used to provide for interaction with a user as well; for example, feedback provided to the user can be any form of sensory feedback, e.g., visual feedback, auditory feedback, or tactile feedback; and input from the user can be received in any form, including acoustic, speech, or tactile input. In addition, a computer can interact with a user by sending resources to and receiving resources from a device that is used by the user; for example, by sending web pages to a web browser on a user's client device in response to requests received from the web browser.

Implementations of the subject matter described in this specification can be implemented in a computing system that includes a back-end component, e.g., as a data server, or that includes a middleware component, e.g., an application server, or that includes a front-end component, e.g., a client computer having a graphical user interface or a Web browser through which a user can interact with an implementation of the subject matter described in this specification, or any combination of one or more such back-end, middleware, or front-end components. The components of the system can be interconnected by any form or medium of digital data communication, e.g., a communication network. Examples of communication networks include a local area network ("LAN") and a wide area network ("WAN"), an inter-network (e.g., the Internet), and peer-to-peer networks (e.g., ad hoc peer-to-peer networks).

The computing system can include clients and servers. A client and server are generally remote from each other and typically interact through a communication network. The relationship of client and server arises by virtue of computer programs running on the respective computers and having a client-server relationship to each other. In some implementations, a server transmits data (e.g., an HTML page) to a client device (e.g., for purposes of displaying data to and receiving user input from a user interacting with the client device). Data generated at the client device (e.g., a result of the user interaction) can be received from the client device at the server.

A system of one or more computers can be configured to perform particular operations or actions by virtue of having software, firmware, hardware, or a combination of them installed on the system that in operation causes or cause the system to perform the actions. One or more computer programs can be configured to perform particular operations or actions by virtue of including instructions that, when executed by data processing apparatus, cause the apparatus to perform the actions.

While this specification contains many specific implementation details, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of any inventions or of what may be claimed, but rather as descriptions of features specific to particular implementations of particular inventions. Certain features that are described in this specification in the context of separate implementations can also be implemented in combination in a single implementation. Conversely, various features that are described in the context of a single implementation can also be implemented in multiple implementations separately or in any suitable subcombination. Moreover, although features may be described above as acting in certain combinations and even initially claimed as such, one or more features from a claimed combination can in some cases be excised from the combination, and the claimed combination may be directed to a subcombination or variation of a subcombination.

Similarly, while operations are depicted in the drawings in a particular order, this should not be understood as requiring that such operations be performed in the particular order shown or in sequential order, or that all illustrated operations be performed, to achieve desirable results. In certain circumstances, multitasking and parallel processing may be advantageous. Moreover, the separation of various system components in the implementations described above should not be understood as requiring such separation in all implementations, and it should be understood that the described program components and systems can generally be integrated together in a single software product or packaged into multiple software products.

Thus, particular implementations of the subject matter have been described. Other implementations are within the

scope of the following claims. In some cases, the actions recited in the claims can be performed in a different order and still achieve desirable results. In addition, the processes depicted in the accompanying figures do not necessarily require the particular order shown, or sequential order, to achieve desirable results. In certain implementations, multitasking and parallel processing may be advantageous.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

receiving, from an image capture device, a first image of an article and a background surface, the background surface being illuminated by one or more light sources;

generating a gray scale image from the first image;

determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface wherein determining the brightness level of the article comprises:

determining, for the gray scale image, a number of a particular pixels that each has a second luminous intensity being within least a specified threshold from the first luminous intensity; and

determining a brightness level of the article based on a ratio between the number of the particular pixels and a total number of pixels in the grayscale image;

determining one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article; and

sending the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters,

wherein receiving, generating, determining, and sending are performed by one or more computer processors.

2. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

receiving, from the image capture device, the second image of the article;

identifying an outline of the article in the second image; and

creating a third image by, based on the brightness level of the article, replacing one or more pixels in the second image that are outside the outline with one or more background pixels representing a specific background for the article in the third image.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the grayscale image has an area smaller than the first image's area.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein a particular control parameter is configured to adjust one or more settings in sensitivity, exposure time, focal length, or aperture size.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein the first image is a still image of a current live view of the image capture device.

6. A system comprising:

one or more computers programmed to perform operations comprising:

receiving, from an image capture device, a first image of an article and a background surface, the background surface being illuminated by one or more light sources;

generating a grayscale image from the first image;

determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface wherein determining the brightness level of the article comprises:

determining, for the gray scale image, a number of particular pixels that each has a second luminous intensity being within least a specified threshold from the first luminous intensity; and

determining a brightness level of the article based on a ratio between the number of the particular pixels and a total number of pixels in the grayscale image;

determining one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article; and

sending the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters.

7. The system of claim **6** wherein the operations further comprise:

receiving, from the image capture device, the second image of the article;

identifying an outline of the article in the second image; and

creating a third image by, based on the brightness level of the article, replacing one or more pixels in the second image that are outside the outline with one or more background pixels representing a specific background for the article in the third image.

8. The system of claim **6**, wherein the grayscale image has an area smaller than the first image's area.

9. The system of claim **6**, wherein a particular control parameter is configured to adjust one or more settings in sensitivity, exposure time, focal length, or aperture size.

10. The system of claim **6**, wherein the first image is a still image of a current live view of the image capture device.

11. A non-transitory storage device having instructions stored thereon that when executed by one or more computers perform operations comprising:

receiving, from an image capture device, a first image of an article and a background surface, the background surface being illuminated by one or more light sources;

generating a grayscale image from the first image;

determining a brightness level of the article in the grayscale image based on a first luminous intensity representing the background surface wherein determining the brightness level of the article comprises:

determining, for the gray scale image, a number of particular pixels that each has a second luminous intensity being within least a specified threshold from the first luminous intensity; and

determining, a brightness level of the article based on a ratio between the number of the particular pixels and a total number of pixels in the grayscale image;

determining one or more control parameters for the image capture device based on the brightness level of the article; and

sending the control parameters to the image capture device, causing the image capture device to configure, for capturing a second image of the article, one or more settings based on the control parameters.

12. The storage device of claim **11** wherein the operations further comprise:

receiving, from the image capture device, the second image of the article;

identifying an outline of the article in the second image; and

creating a third image by, based on the brightness level of the article, replacing one or more pixels in the second image that are outside the outline with one or more background pixels representing a specific background for the article in the third image.

13. The storage device of claim **11**, wherein the grayscale image has an area smaller than the first image's area.

14. The storage device of claim 11, wherein a particular control parameter is configured to adjust one or more settings in sensitivity, exposure time, focal length, or aperture size.

15. The storage device of claim 11, wherein the first image is a still image of a current live view of the image capture device.

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